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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that oral language plays a critical role in facilitating a child's written language learning, a study examined the nature and function of oral language between child and teacher and child and peer as it accompanied the writing processes and written production of young children. Participants in the study were 36 prekindergarten children from one early childhood education center. Data were collected by videotaping teacher-child dyads as well as children and teachers working in small groups during writing events. Two videotapings of five four-year-old children were also made during a planned, written language activity. The findings revealed that the children's oral language seemed to fulfill an organizational function, directing their activities as they worked. Sounding to probe for sound-symbol relations, letter naming, discussion of ability to write and the need for help, self-directing statements, discussion of letter formation, discussion of placement, and discussion of title and authorship all appeared to be functions of oral language that assisted the children in obtaining needed information from others and themselves that would enable them to proceed with the writing process. (HOD)

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# THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF PREKINDERGARTEN CHILDREN'S ORAL LANGUAGE AS IT ACCOMPANIES THEIR WRITING PROCESS

Carol Taylor Schrader, Ph. D.

## Introduction

The development of written language in young children has been studied from the sociopsycholinguistic perspective by several researchers during the past decade (Clay, 1975 1982; Dyson 1981, 1983; Ferriero, 1978; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Graves, 1975, 1981, 1982, 1983; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Read, 1971, 1973, 1975). This research has led to increased understandings of how young writers attempt actively to understand the nature of the written language surrounding them and to formulate their own writing system through a variety of learning-to-write strategies.

The research of Clay (1975) considered how children move from scribbling to producing marks which more and more closely resembled the writing seen in their environment. She saw a slow revelation of certain graphic principles in the children's scribbles -- principles such as directionality, flexibility, generativity, and recurrence (pp. 20-41). From Clay's findings we can see that children's written langauge productions indicate a

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developmental process from nonstandard representations to conventional spelling, including scribbles, alternative scripts, pictures, random letters and numerals, organized letter sequences, invented spelling, and conventional graphic representations other than their own name.

Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) reported that the children in their studies constructed written language for themselves, selectively using information provided by the environment. For example, the children noted that writing is linear, is functional, is composed of letters, and that words contain a certain number of letters. The children worked a long time before discovering that the writing surrounding them was alphabetic. They explored other hypotheses first, some of them not being adequate for the alphabetical system although they would be appropriate for other systems of writing. The writing that preceeded the alphabetical period was structured, however, and provided evidence of the children's efforts toward understanding the rules of the system. Children functioned as active learners who composed, excluded, ordered, categorized, reformulated, confirmed, formed hypotheses, and reorganized in cognitively action-oriented ways.

Read's (1971) study considered the ways in which preschool children wrote personal messages. He noted that

each of the children's writings contained spellings that were partly of their own invention, and that there were common characteristics in these "invented spellings." Apparently, once children had learned the conventional names of the letters of the alphabet and realized that letters represented words and their sounds, they constructed spellings on the basis of that knowledge. In other words, they spelled according to how the words sounded and their knowledge of the letter names. The children were consistent in forming sound-symbol relationships based on what they heard at the point of sound articulation.

Graves (1975) studied how children in grades one through four gain control of the writing process. His observations and analyses of the children's writing led him to report that the children were most concerned with just getting the marks on the paper. Only then did they need to hear and see what the makes meant. They controlled their writing through drawing and speaking as they wrote, and in discussing the writing with friends and the teacher. Writing was egocentric and more speech than writing.

He observed that most young writers produce language and sound when they write, that they make a transition, a "never-ending shift" from speech to print as they work with written language. "The human voice underlies the entire

writing process" (Graves, 1983, pp. 161-162). Graves (1982, pp. 21-22) classified this oral language as follows:

1. Sounding to probe for sound-symbol relation.

2. Sounding to break off a phonemic unit from the word under attack.

3. Rereading language for reorientation in the composing unit: the child must hear where he is in the text, and the difficulty or length of time spent on the composing operation determines how much the writer must reread.

4. Conversations with friends: " This monster is going to eat up all the good guys".

5. Procedural language: " Now what am I going to do? No, this isn't right. I need to change it".

6. Advanced statements of the text: the child says the text in order to sense the appropriateness of the current word.

7. Conversations before and after the composing: Not only is the child speaking during the composing, but language surrounds the entire written event. Before: " I'm going to write about monsters today". After: " I'm finished".

Dyson's study (1981, 1983) of kindergarten children's writing behaviors also provided insights into how children

make the transition from speech to writing and the role oral language plays during the writing process. She concluded that talk is an integral part of beginning to write, providing meaning and the systematic means for getting that meaning on paper. Dyson stated that the children's oral language served two functions: to direct their activities and to represent their experiences.

More recently, Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) concluded from their observations of young writers that oral speech during writing episodes not only signaled intentionality, but acted as a plan of writing action. It seemingly served an organizational function.

These findings support earlier notions of Britton (1970, pp. 164-166) and Britton, et. al. (1975, p. 11). He stated that the writing of young children was very much like speech written down and seemed to be the mode in which they chiefly write. Vygotsky's (1978) position suggeted that young children's graphic symbols were "second-order symbols which function as designations for verbal ones.... Understanding of written language is first effected through spoken language, but gradually this path is curtailed and spoken language disappears as the intermediate link" (pp. 114-116).

Taken together, the literature reviewed strongly suggests that young writers use a variety of learning-to-write strategies as they actively go about the business of constructing their own knowledge of the writing system and process. Furthermore, it appears that oral language plays a critical role in facilitating the child's written language learning. It is the purpose of this paper to share understandings gained from a study which considerered the nature and function of oral language between child and teacher and child and child as it accompanied the writing processes and written productions of young children.

## Participants

Thirty-six preKindergarten children from one early childhood education center were selected as participants in the study. These children are primarily from middleclass familiies. Most of the parents are college educated and employed in a profession. Some are graduate students. A few children are from minority racial and ethnic groups.

The five teachers who worked with the children have college degrees in education. Four have state certification in elementary education. One teacher has early childhood

education certification. The center is in a midwestern community where the regard for education is stimulated by the presence of two private colleges and a state university.

## Data Collection Procedures

Videotapings during writing events served as the means for data collection. This enabled the researcher to study the child-child and child-teacher oral language transactions for descriptive analysis. Graves' (1982) categories of oral language produced during writing events served as the initial coding system. These categories were modified during the data analysis. (See section at data analysis.)

The children's written language productions from the videotaped writing events also were collected and studied for identifiable writing patterns and learning-to-write strategies. Analyses were based on methodologies used in the writing research of Clay (1975), Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) and Graves (1975).

The data deemed necessary for this study were collected by (1) videotaping teacher-child dyads and (2) by videotaping children and teachers working in small groups during writing events. Two videotapings of five four-year-old children, each paired with a different teacher, were made during a researcher-planned, written

language activity. The child was asked by the reseracher to draw a picture and then write about it. The child was told that the teacher could help if asked. Neither the child nor the teacher had previous instructions from the investigator nor an opportunity to preplan for the writing event. This procedure identified the learning-to-write strategies each child used during writing. The activity took place in the child's classroom during the school day. The children's drawing and writing productions were collected for analyses.

Then small groups of three-, four- and five-year old children were videotaped twice working with their regular small group teacher (five groups; five teachers) during a teacher planned writing activity. These activities took place during the program's regularly scheduled small group time. The children's written productions were collected.

## Descriptive Analysis of Data

Descriptive data analysis procedures were used to answer the research question raised in this study: What is the nature and function of prekindergarten children's oral language as it accompanies the writing process?

Excerpts from the video typescripts, along with the children's drawing and writing productions, provided examples of the youngsters' learning-to-write strategies as

these are referred to in the reports and discussions.

Analysis of the children's oral language productions led to the following categories:

(1) sounding to probe for sound-symbol relation;

(2) letter naming;

(3) rereading language for reorientation in the composing unit;

(4) conversations with others;

(5) discussion of ability to write and need for help;

(6) discussion of what is being written or what has been written;

(7) child self-directing statements before, during and after the composing;

(8) discussion of letter formation;

(9) oral language simultaneous with writing;

(10) discussion of placement;

(11) oral reading after completion of writing;

(12) discussion of title; and

(13) discussion of authorship.

## Examples of Oral and Written Language

For the purpose of this paper, examples of children's language transactions are selected from the typescripts to illustrate each of the oral language categories. The written language productions that accompanied their oral language are also included.

**1. Sounding to probe for sound-symbol relation** (Graves, 1982)

Only one child was observed struggling orally with sound-symbol relationships. As he did so, he looked to the teacher for clues. It was another child, however, who volunteered what he knew.

The children were asked to "make up stories" for magazine pictures; each child had a different one. Brett repeated the word "foodball" in search of sound-symbol relationships (Figure 1). His classmate's suggestion was as follows:

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| | Ffffff. What is that sound? Fffff. Would it be the F sound? Ffffff. (Brett) |
| If you don't know how to spell it, you can pretend. | |
| | When you feel the F sound, your teeth are |

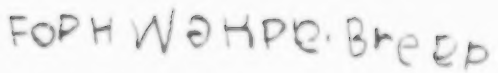

Figure 1. Brett's writing: "I came home from a football game with my dog."

touching your bottom lip. (Rusty)

Fffff. F. F. (Brett)

OK, sounds good.

F. Should I make it in big letters or small letters? (Brett)

However you want to write it.

Bbbb, ball, ball, football, ba, ba, ba. (Brett)

---

2. Letter naming

Some children named the letters they were writing. Their purposes appeared to be to confirm the name of a written letter, to tell what letter(s) had been written, to verbalize the spelling of a word, and to inquire about the spelling of a word someone else was writing.

David had drawn a picture of a rainbow and was attempting to write about it (Figure 2). He used the letters of his name and identified each one as he wrote. David also drew and wrote about his mother, again naming letters he was using for her name [G E]. (The mother's name is Glenda.) Finally, the child drew a second rainbow, wrote a rearrangement of letters in his name [DDAID], naming each one as he wrote it.

Figure 2. David's drawing and writing.

| Teacher | Child |
| --- | --- |
| What would you like to put down that you think would stand for rainbow? | |
| | U? I don't know. |
| What letters would you like to use? | |
| OK. D. | |
| | D? |
| | (Writes a letter D.) |
| Then what would you like to use? | |
| | Then what? |
| What letter would you like to use next? | |
| | A? (Writes a letter A.) |
| OK. | |
| | Now.... |
| Now what? | |
| | Just...like my name! |
| Are you going to write it just like you name? | |
| OK. | |
| | Just the same. |
| | What comes after A? I got D-A... |
| In your name? | |
| | Un-huh. [yes.] |
| What's your name? | |
| | D-A-V- (Writes a letter V.) |
| Good. | |
| | I-D. Writes letters I and D.) |
| OK. That's your name, isn't it? | |
| | Un-huh, but it doesn't make it rainbow. |
| But you want it to stand for rainbow? | |
| | (David discussed and drew a picture of his mother.) |
| You want to write about your mom? | |
| | I don't know what she starts with... a G. |
| OK. | |
| | I don't know how to make a G. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Just do your best. | |
| | There. (Writes a G.) |
| That looks good to me. | |
| | And I don't know what's next. |
| What do you think? Whatever your want to put down. | |
| | Well... E. That's a E. (Writes a letter E.) |
| That an E. | |
| | That's all the letters. |

---

3. Rereading language for reorientation in the composing unit. (Graves, 1982)

Only two children were observed using this strategy. In both cases the children reread what they had written, verbalized what was to be added and proceeded to write it down. The procedure was repeated until the writing event was terminated.

Aaron had drawn the picture in Figure 3. All conversation between teacher and child during the drawing time had pretained to the colors he was using. There had been no dialoguing about the meaning of his picture. The child read as he wrote (Figure 4). Each time he added to his text, he orally reread what he had previously written.

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| | This boy is cry---ing. (Reads as he writes.) |

Figure 3. Aaron's drawing.

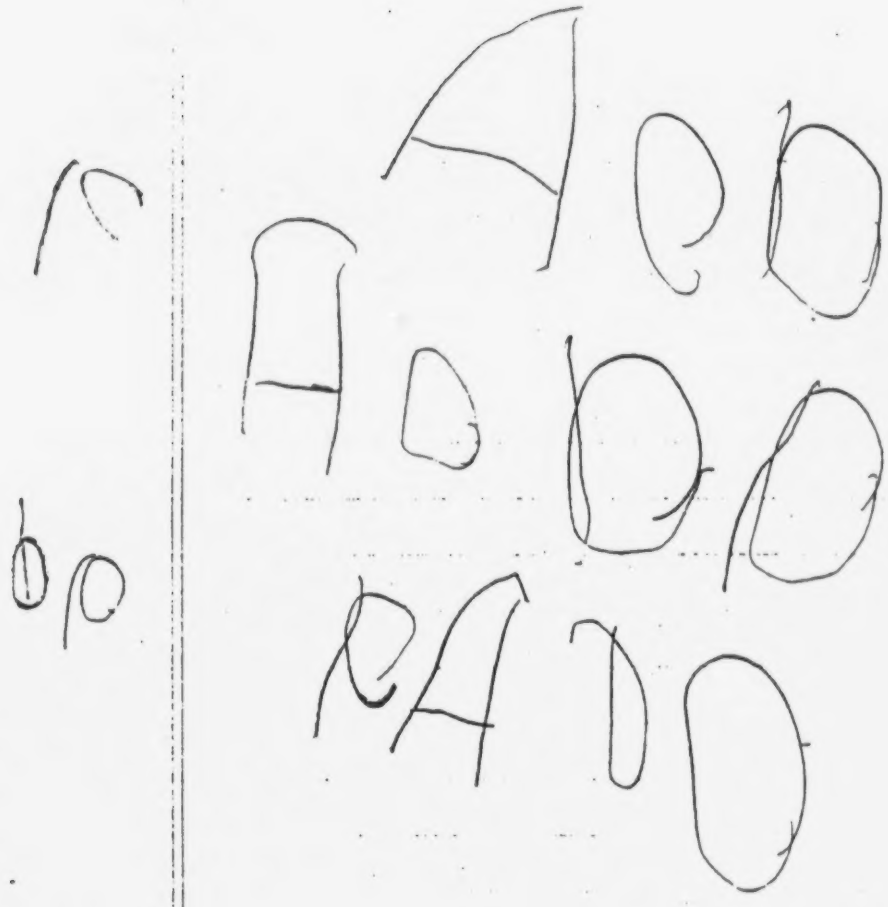

Figure 4. Aaron's writing about his drawing:
"This boy is crying 'cause there is rain and it's snowing 'cause there's a monster outside in the snow."

Uh-huh. Why is he crying?

'Cause there's rain.

Can you write that down so if somebody comes and looks at this when you're not here, they'll know what's happening?

This boy is crying 'cause --- there is rain. (Rereads and adds to his text.)

OK. Very good. Anyting else you'd like to say about the picture?

Yup. This boy's crying 'cause there's rain and it's snowing 'cause there a monster outside in the snow. (Rereads and adds to his text.)

Sounds like a good story. Anything else happing here? (Points to drawing.)

No.

Are you finished?

Uh-huh [Yes].

---

4. Discussion of content with others.

This was the most prevalent type of oral language used by the children. During all of the writing events there were child-child and child-teacher conversations. These usually pretained to thematic content. At other times there were brief comments about writing paper and instruments.

Stephanie drew a picture of her house and Santa (Figure 5). She visited with the teacher about the meaning of her

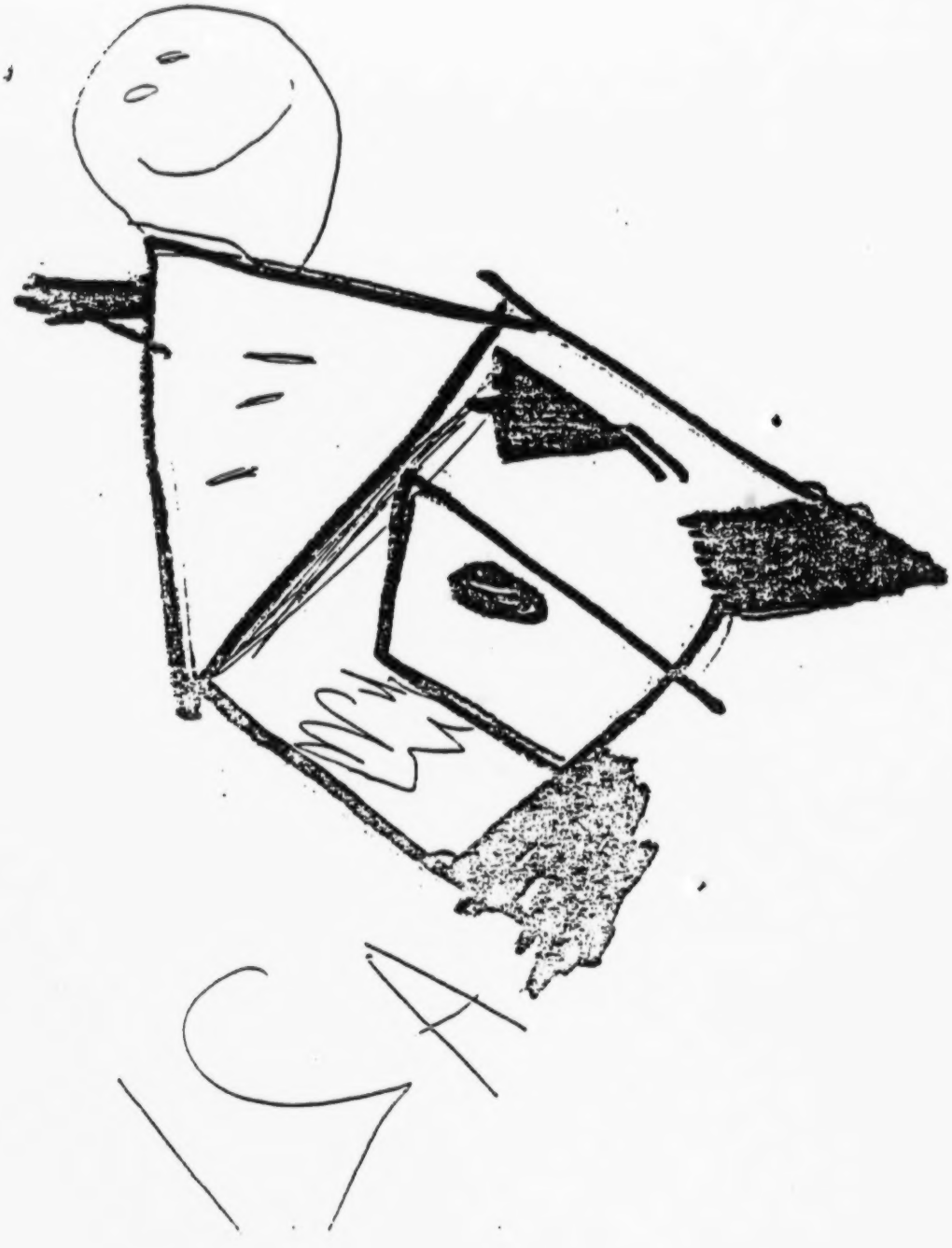

Figure 5. Stephanie's fourth drawing and writing: "Santa and house."

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drawing as she worked. Stephanie then wrote about her picture and read her writing.

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| | (Begins drawing.) That's the roof. |
| Uh-huh. I can tell. Is that your house? | |
| | And this is the doorbell. |
| The doorbell? Mmmmm. You must have a fancy doorbell at your house. Nice house you live in. Can you do some writing about your house? | |
| | This is the ceiling. (Continues to draw.) |
| The what? The ceiling. Nice. | |
| | And this is Santa. |
| Santa! He's gonna go down the chimney? | |
| | And this is the Christmas tree. |
| Oh, it's Christmas time at your house! What a nice Christmas tree. Would you like to write about this story? | |
| | (Writes.) |
| Can you read it? | |
| | Santa and House. (Taps paper with pencil as she reads.) |

5. Discussion of ability to write and need for help.

There were several examples of the older four- and five-year-old children expresssing a concern about their ability to write and need for help from the teachers. The teachers struggled with appropriate responses, wanting to

encourage the children to rely on their own model of writing without telling them how to spell and write the adult model.

The children were invited to write lists of birthday gift suggestions for four-year-old children. They were given toy pictures to look at and talk about and pencils and paper (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9).

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| I'm putting out some pictures. Now look through and when you find something you think the boy and girl would like, write it down so I'll know. | |
| | I don't know how to spell ..... I don't know how to spell words. (Heather) |
| Do the best you can. Remember when we did groceries? You just wrote it down. Do the best you can. | |
| | Teacher, I don't know what Star Wars starts with. (Ryan) |
| That's OK. Just write the best you can. | |
| | I don't know how to write. (Natalee) |
| | Me either. (Carrie) |
| Do the best you can. I'll be able to read it. | |

Figure 6. Heather's list.

Figure 7. Ryan's list.

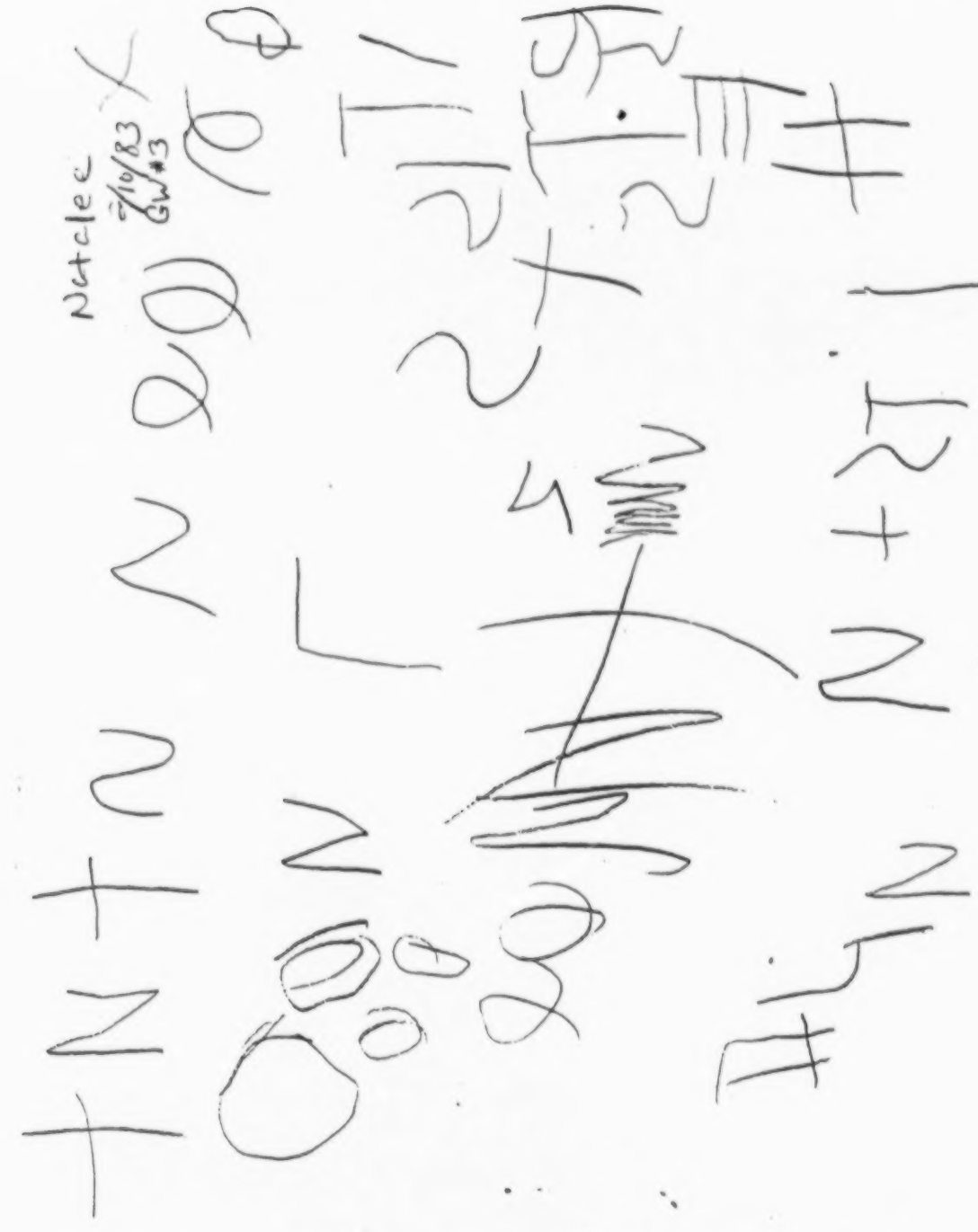


Figure 8. Natalee's list.

Figure 9. Carrie's list.

6. Discussion of the written product.

There were frequent discussions of the written product by the children. They commented to the teacher or to other children about what they were writing or had written.

The children were writing a lists of suggestions for the school cook to use in menu planning (Figures 10, 11). They were given newspaper grocery pictures and print to look at and talk about. They youngsters talked with each other and the teacher about what they had written.

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| | What's that say? Brandon points to his writing.) |
| What do you think that would say? | |
| | Fishsticks (Rusty and Brett answer for Brandon.) |
| Fishsticks, OK. | |
| | Uhhhhhh! (Steps back.) |
| You didn't want fishsticks on your list? | |
| | I didn't know that! |
| | I put fishsticks. (Brett) |
| | Can I just mark that one off? (Brandon) |
| | I bet I made the longest list. (Brett) |

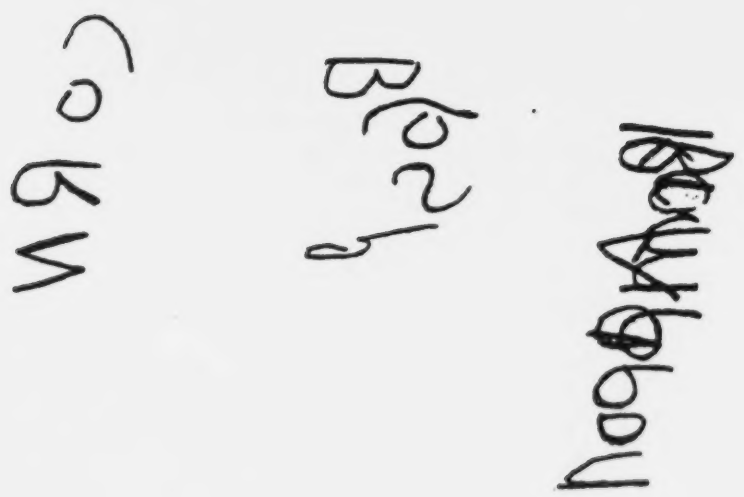

Figure 10. Brandon's writing: "Corn, Fishsticks" with "Brandon" written over "Fishsticks."

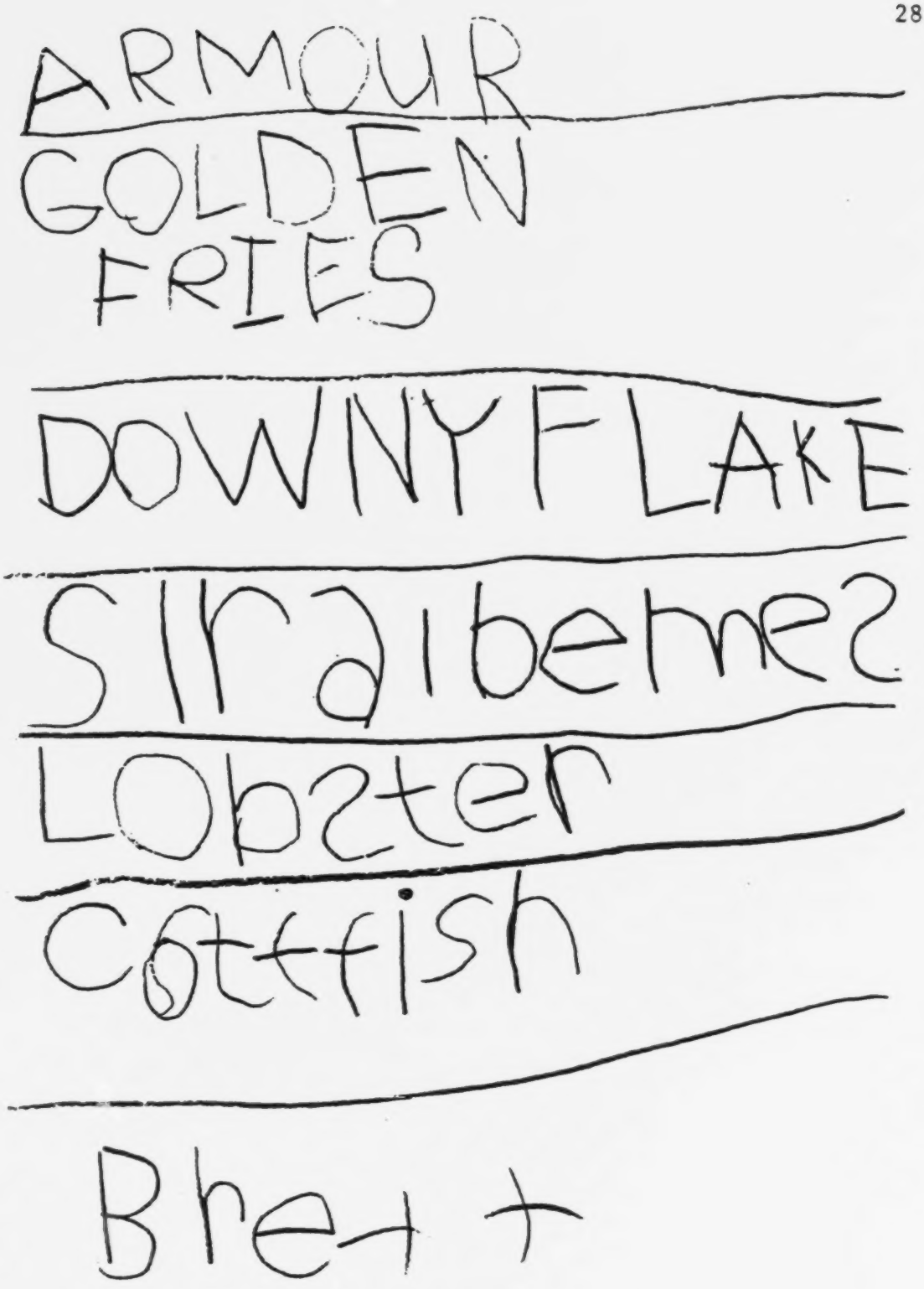


Figure 11. Brett's writing.

7. Child self-directing statements.

Some children stated that they were going to write specific things, that they were not finished writing, or that they were finished. These comments were oftentimes in response to the teacher's invitation to talk about what they were going to write or to read what they had written. In all cases these statements enabled childre to maintain control of the writing process.

The children wrote recipe cards (Figures 12, 13, 14, 15). They had discussed recipe ingredients and instructions. They had also talked about the food pictures that were passed out to the group, naming the dish and some of its ingredients. As the children worked, each one was invited to read what he or she had written so far.

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| | I'm gonna write raspberry jam. (Melanie) |
| After you write your ingredients make sure you write down how you make it. | |
| | I'm going to write down mushroom. (Thad) |
| | I'm gonna write milk. (Steven) |
| | I got it done. (Thad) |
| Did you write down how to make the spaghetti? | |
| | Yeah. (Thad) |

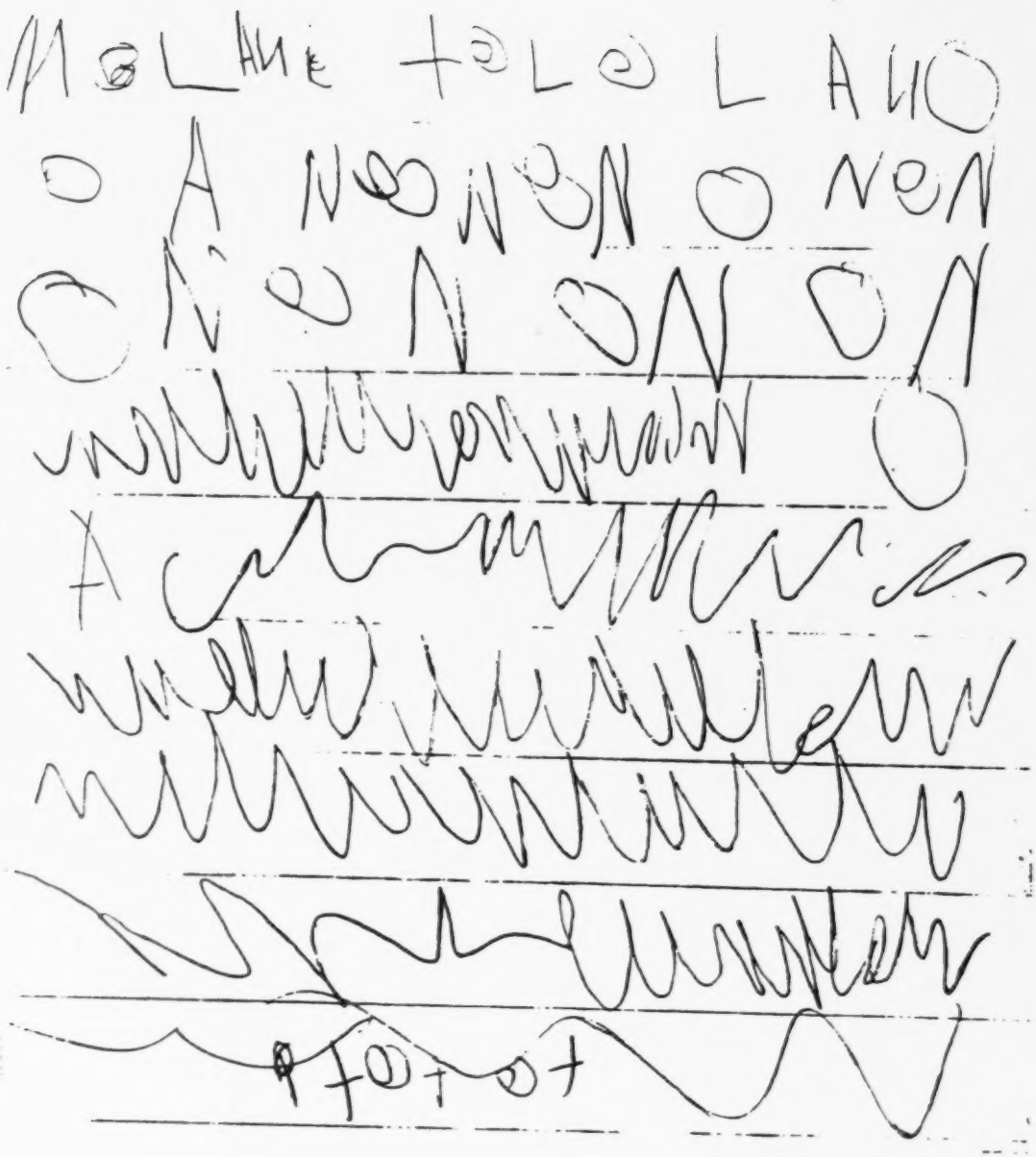

Figure 12. Melanie's recipe: "2 cups of milk and dough. 4 cups of sugar. 1 cup of nuts, 3 cups of honey and bread and 4 cups of [inaudible on tape]."

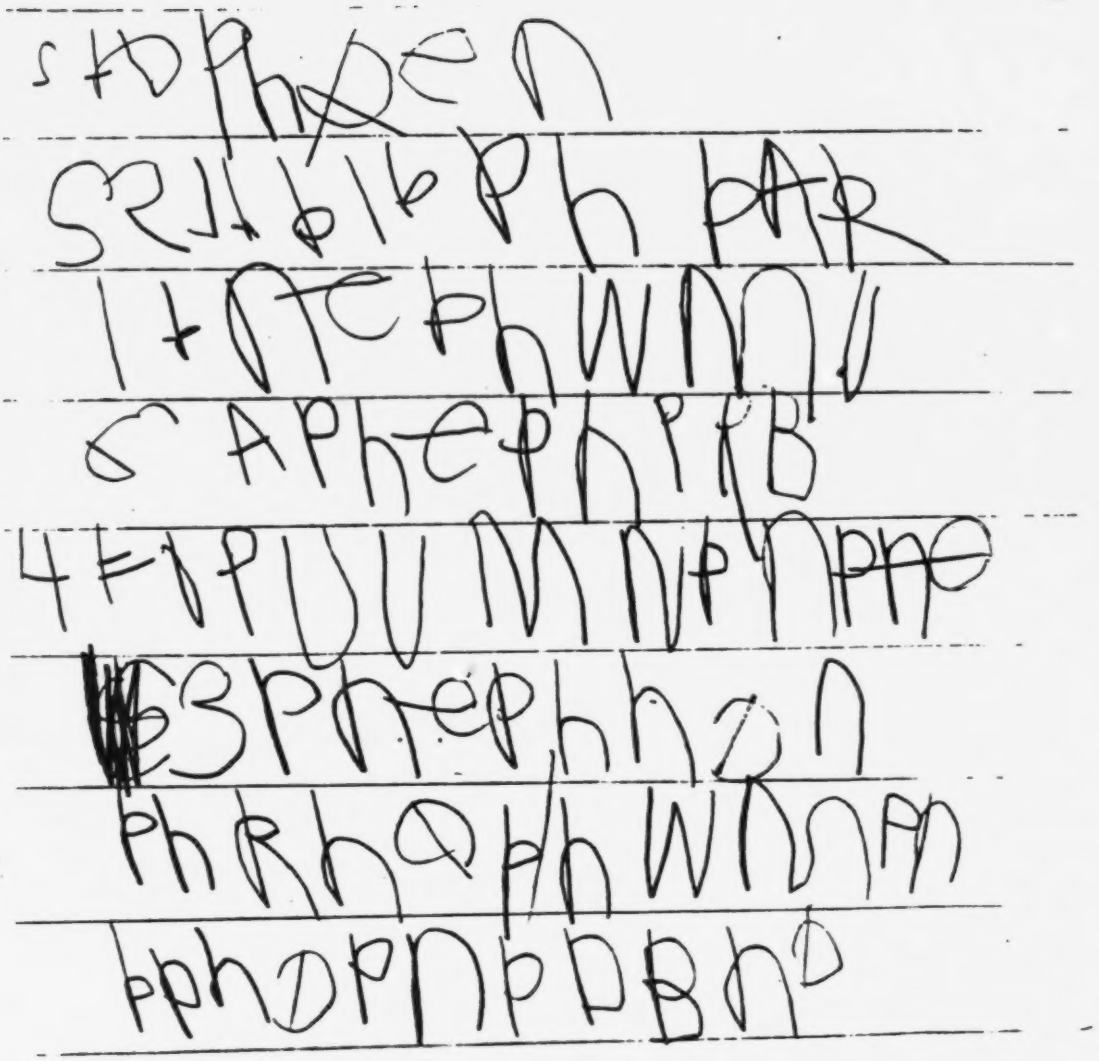

Figure 13: Stephen's recipe: "4 cups of milk, 2 cups of sugar, 8 cups of chocolate chips, 5 cups of [inaudible on the tape]."

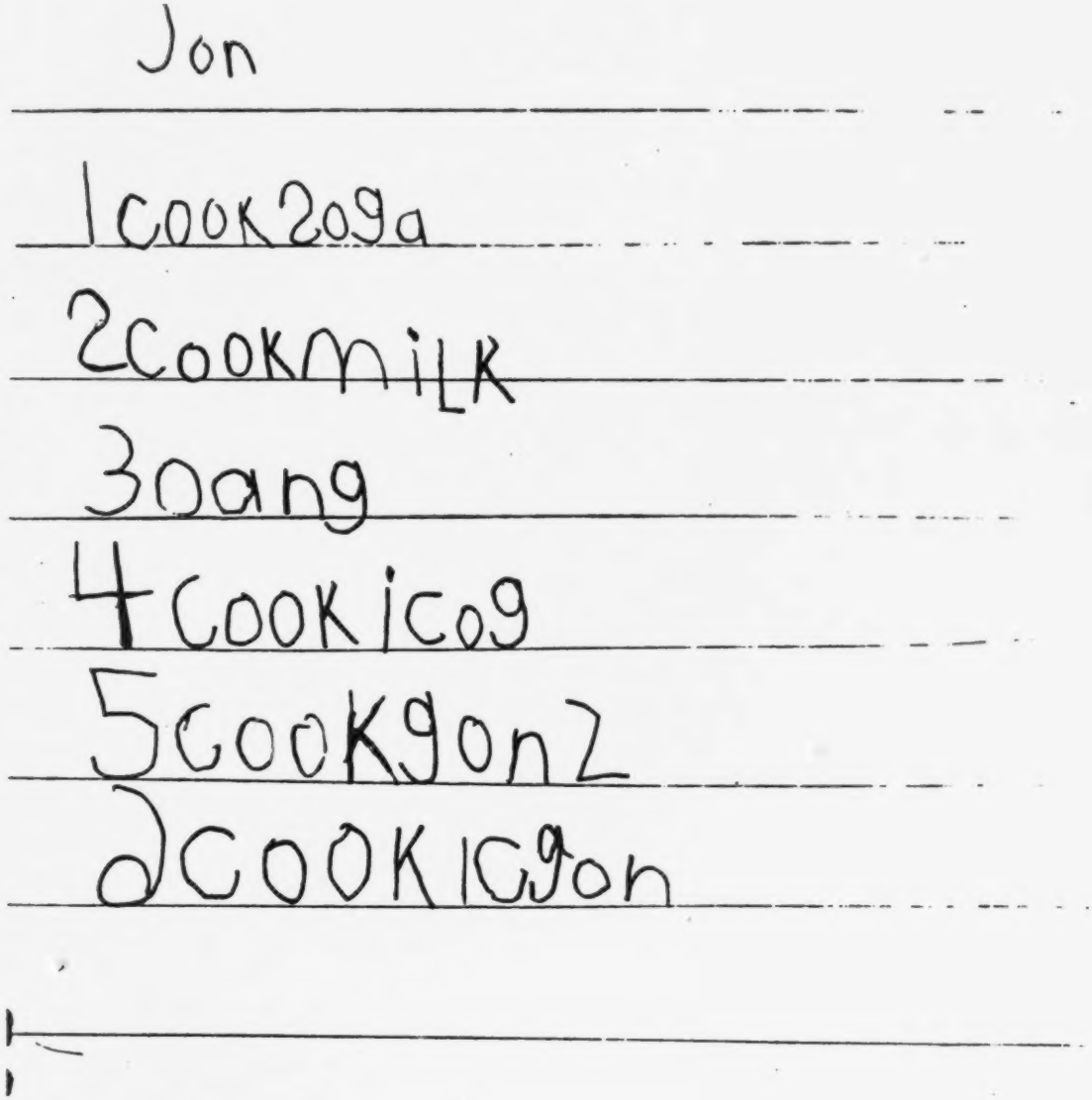


Figure 14. Jon's recipe.

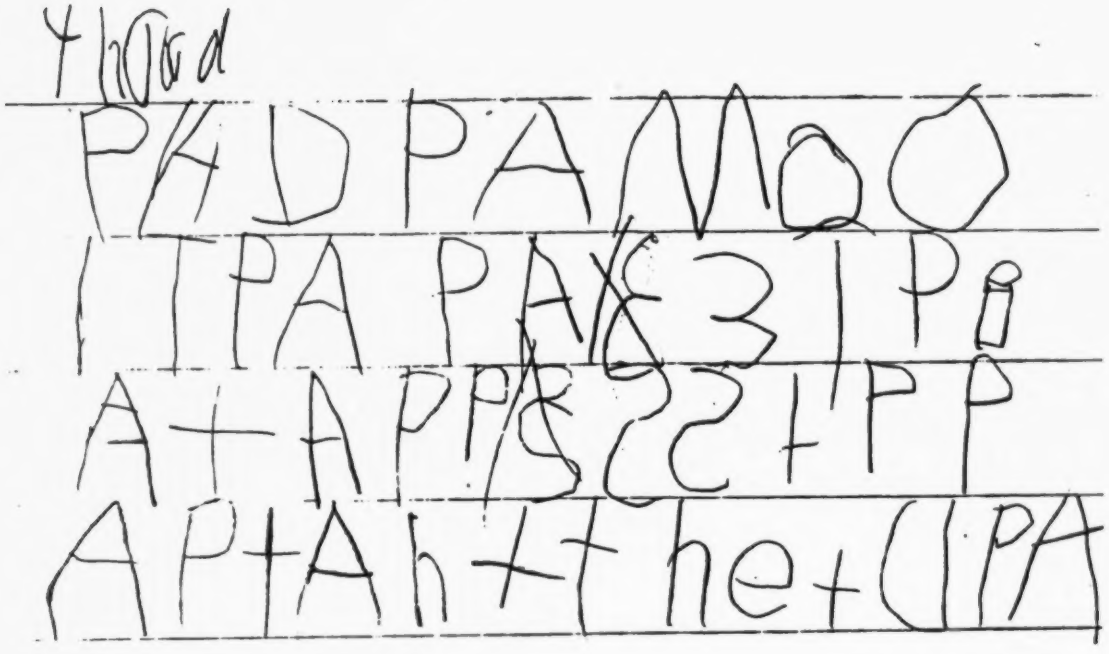

Figure 15. Thad's recipe.

Well, good Steven.

I'm not done. (Jon)

But you're doing it right now?

---

**8. Discussion of letter formation.**

Only occassionally did children talk about letter formation. In most cases these were casual comments made to themselves or to whoever might be listening. Sometimes they were made to the teacher and her response was expected.

The children had listened to a story about two little boys who were looking for a present for their mother. They had talked about what the children in the story found for their mother and also what they would like to give to their mothers for a birthday present. They were then to write down their gift suggestions on list form paper (Figures 16, 17, 18). During the writing activity some children talked about the way they or someone else was forming letters.

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| | Leah's scribbling. (Kim) |
| That's how Leah writes, isn't it Leah. | |
| | I can make B's now. (Bradley) |
| Can you write your name on | |

Figure 16. Leah's drawing and writing.
(Reading is inaudible on the tape.)

Figure 17. Bradley's drawing and writing;
"This is a B and this is a D."

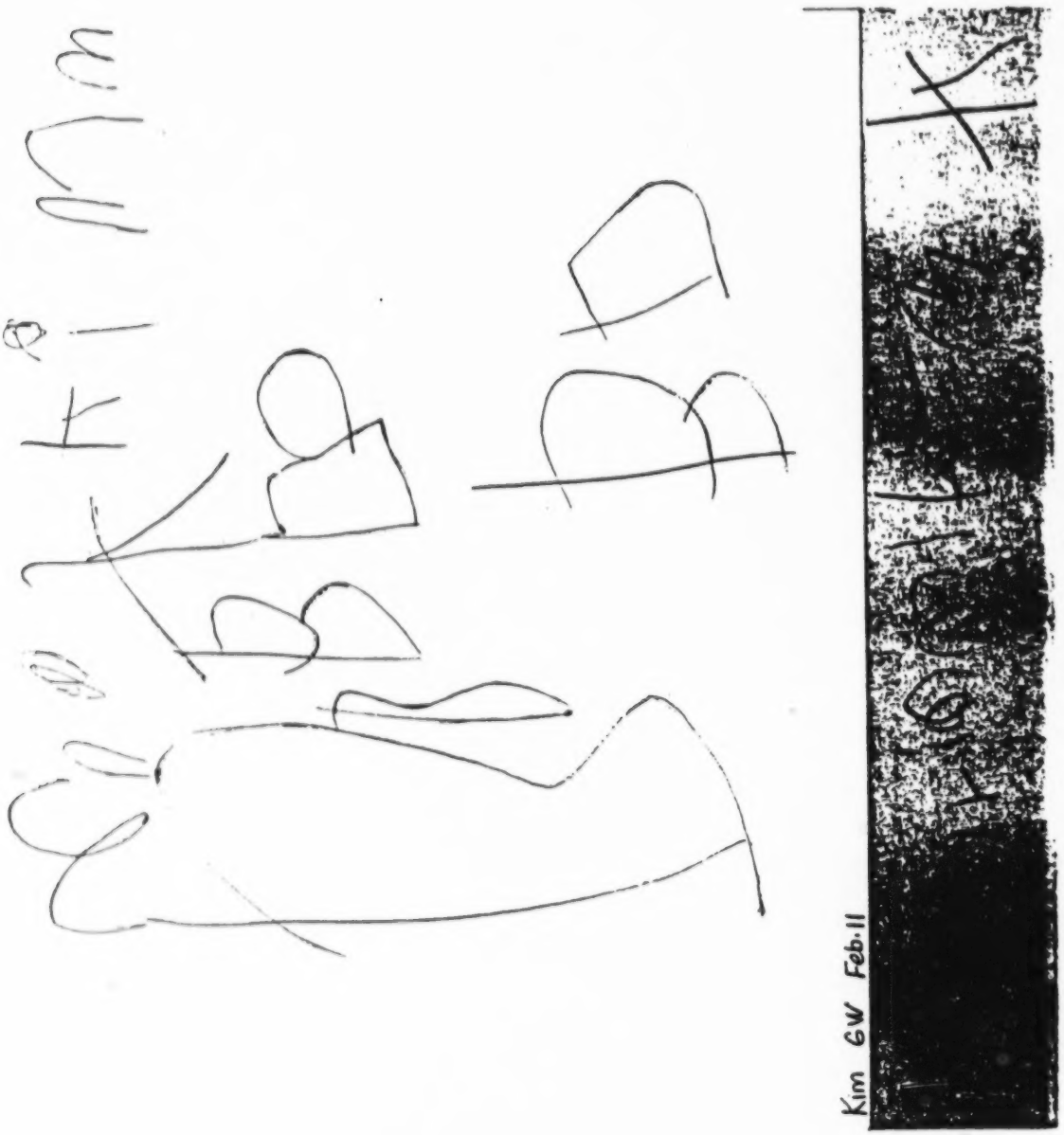


Figure 18. Kim'sdrawing and writing: "This is a lion."

there, Bradley, so we know it's your paper?

I'll write his name on my paper. You don't really know how to write your name. (Kim)

Uh-huh [Yes]. (Bradley)

---

9. Oral language simultaneous with writing.

There were a few examples of the children orally languaging what they were writing as they wrote. They used a slow reading-type voice and matched the length of their oral languaging with the length of their writing.

Courtney had drawn a picture about a ghost mouse who was lifting up rocks. He couldn't hold them, though, and he dropped them on his toes (Figure 19). Courtney talked with her teacher about the meaning of her picture and read her writing as she wrote (Figure 20). Each time she added to her oral story she also added to her written text, making the oral and written text the same length.

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| OK, could you read that story to me about the mouse? | |
| | The mouse went deep, deep in the water to find some rocks (Reads) and he |

Figure 19. Courtney's second drawing, the ghost mouse.

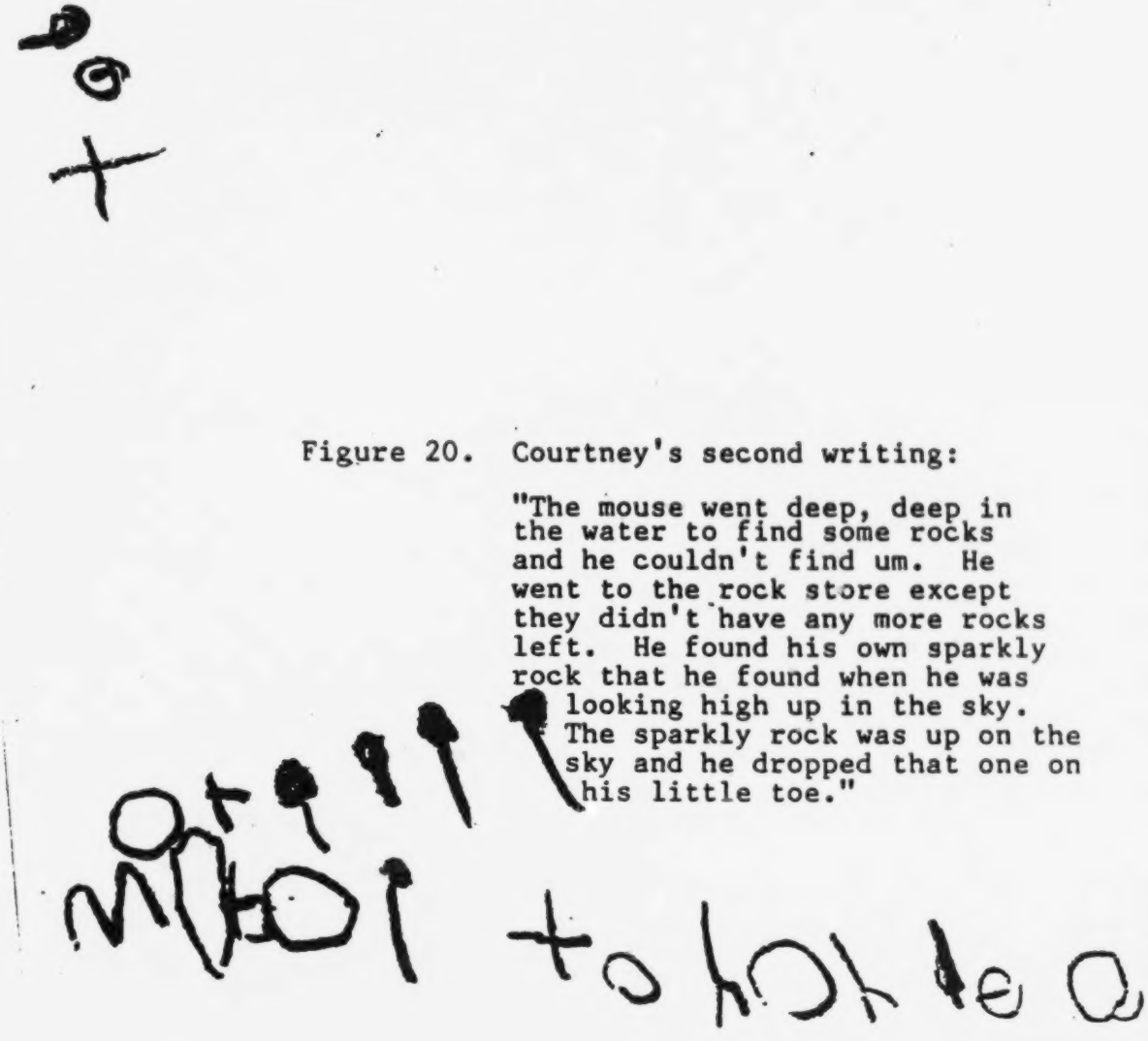

Figure 20. Courtney's second writing:

"The mouse went deep, deep in the water to find some rocks and he couldn't find um. He went to the rock store except they didn't have any more rocks left. He found his own sparkly rock that he found when he was looking high up in the sky. The sparkly rock was up on the sky and he dropped that one on his little toe."

couldn't find um. (Talks as she adds to her text.)

What did he do when he couldn't find the rocks?

He went to the rock store except they didn't have any more left. (Talks as she adds to her text.)

Well what is he going to do? He can't find any more rocks left.

Suddenly in the pond, and guess what he found, his own sparkly rock that he found when he was looking high up in the sky. (Talks as she adds to her text.)

Oh, that is a nice story. I like those sparkly rocks. Is that sparkly rock on the front here? (Looks at child's drawing.)

See, here's the sparkly rock.(Points to drawing.) And see the sparkly rock way up in the sky and he dropped that one on his little toe. (Talk as she adds to her text.)

This is a very nice story, Courtney.

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10. Discussion of placement.

Comments concerning placement were rare. When they did occur they were made by the child in response to the teacher's statement or question about where the child had written or intended to write something. Evidently this was not a concern discussed by the children.

Courtney had drawn a picture and had talked about each part of her drawing. When she began to write her teacher suggested that she start at the top of the paper (Figure 21). Courtney, however, elected to begin farther down.

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| You want to start another piece of paper? You want to start at the top of it? | |
| | I'm gonna start down here. (Writes.) |
| Good, tell me what you wrote! | |
| | I'm not done. |
| Oh, alright. | |

In another example, the children were given paper and pencils to write a list of toys they would suggest as birthday presents for children their own age (Figure 22). The teacher instructed them to first write their names on their papers (Figure 23).

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| Put your name on the paper. | |
| | On the back? (Garth) |
| Wherever you would like to is fine. | |

Figure 21. Courtney's writing: "This is a turkey."
"This is a turkey farm."

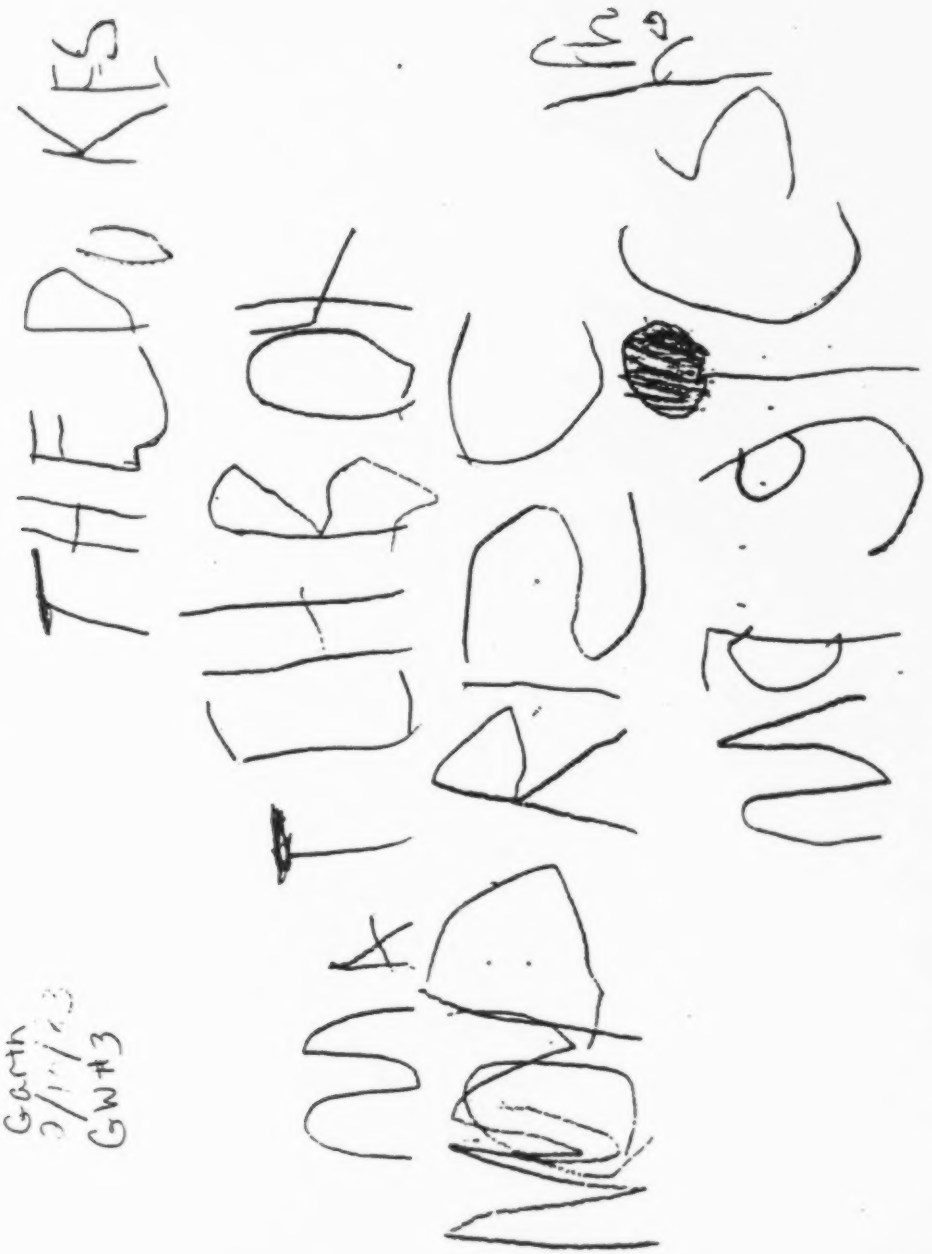



Figure 22. Garth's toy list.

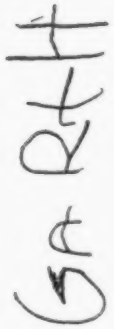


Figure 23. Garth's name on the back of his list.

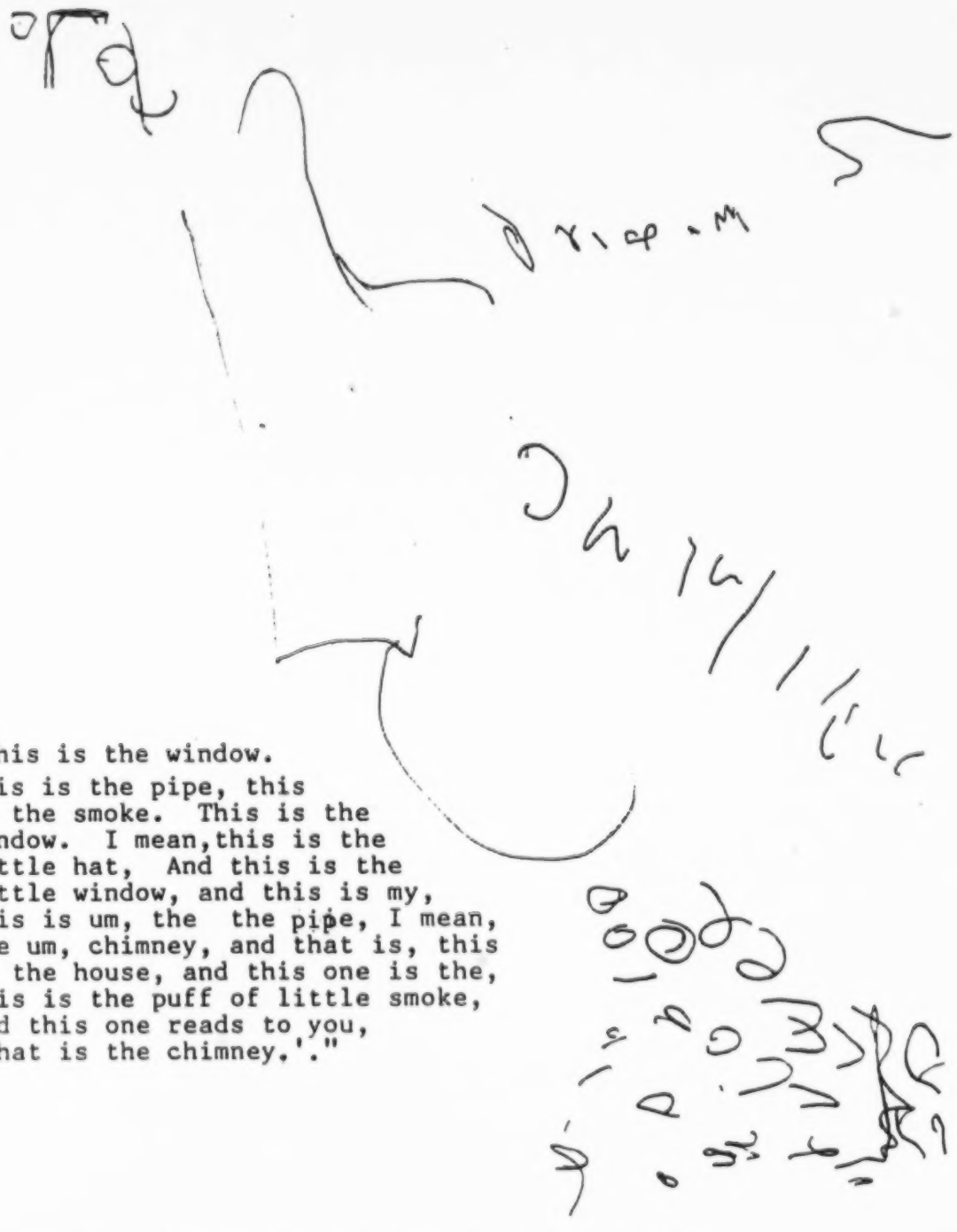
11. Oral reading after completion of writing.

Nearly all children willingly read what they had written to themselves, to other children, and to the teachers. Such reading occurred after completion of the entire text or after completion of part of the text.

Courtney drew a picture and talked about each part of her drawing (Figure 24). Upon completion of the writing activity her teacher invited her to read what she had written (Figure 25). Courtney not only read her entire text but also indicated how her graphic symbols corresponded with the parts of her drawing.

| Teacher | Child |
|---|---|
| | I did [wrote] all about it [the drawing]. |
| Can you read it to me? | |
| | This is the window. This the pipe, this is the pipe, this is the smoke. This is ... this is the window. I mean this is the little hat. And this is the little window, and this is my, this is um, the the pipe, I mean, the um, chimney, and that is, this is the house, and this one is the, this is the puff of little smoke, and this one reads to you, "That is the chimney.". (Points to writing and corresponding drawing as she reads.) |

Figure 24. Courtney's drawing.



"This is the window.
This is the pipe, this
is the smoke. This is the
window. I mean,this is the
little hat, And this is the
little window, and this is my,
this is um, the the pipe, I mean,
the um, chimney, and that is, this
is the house, and this one is the,
this is the puff of little smoke,
and this one reads to you,
'That is the chimney.'."

Figure 25. Courtney's writing about her drawing.

Uh-um. Well, that's a very nice little story.

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12. Discussion of title.

There was only one incident of the children discussing titles, and this was in response to a question posed by the teacher. A listening child showed an interest and also mentioned titles.

Rusty had a picture and had been writing about it, but without accompanying oral language (Figures 26, 27). Brett indicated he was listening to the teacher-child dialogue.

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| Is this your story, Rusty, or is this your title? | |
| | Title (Rusty) |
| OK, will you start writing your story now? | |
| | I'm done. (Brett) |
| You've got your whole story written down there? Everything you want to say about this picture? | |
| | Except the title. (Brett) |
| Oh, why don't you put that down? | |
| | Why? |
| It's part of your story. | |

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Figure 26. Rusty's magazine picture.

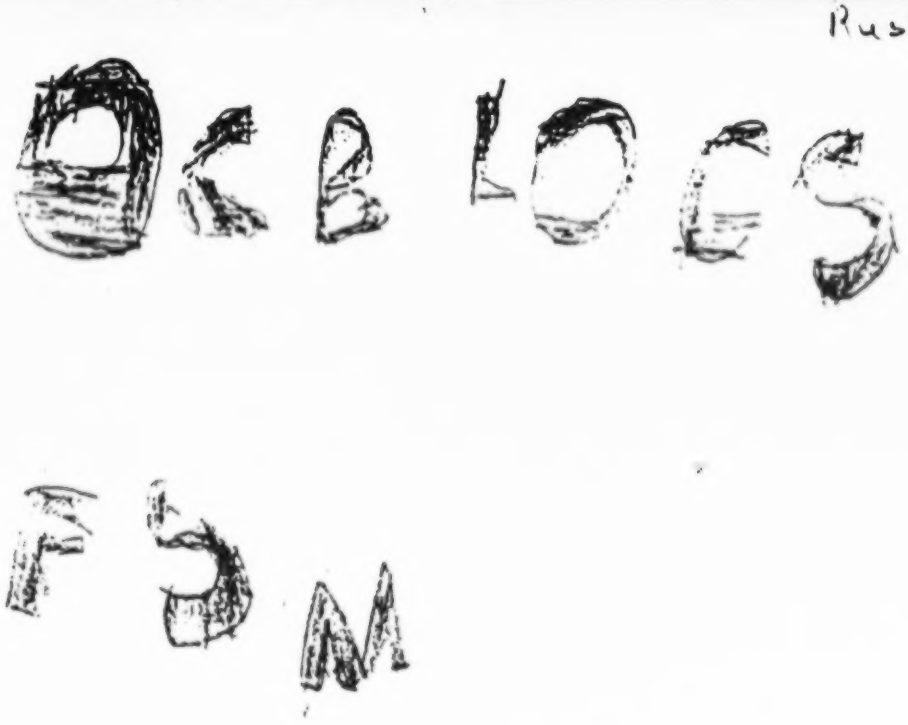


Figure 27. Rusty's writing about his magazine picture: "The lock block party."

13. Discussion of authorship.

There was only one incident of the children discussing authorship, and this was initiated by the teacher's comments. Brett seemed to be struggling to understand the concept of authorship, and Rusty contributed what he knew.

| Teacher | Children |
|---|---|
| Brett, can you think of what else you want to put with your story? | |
| | Like what? (Brett) |
| Well, like who wrote it? That's what books have, too, don't they? I was thinking of the author's name, who wrote the book, who wrote the story. | |
| | Brett wrote the story. (Rusty) |
| Uh-huh [yes]. | |
| | I did not wrote the story. I had somebody to help me with this picture. (Refers to magazine picture.) This ... I made a story by myself. (Brett) |
| You're writing a story about this picture. | |
| | I know. (Brett) |

## Discussion and Implications

The videotapings of the prekindergarten children's learning-to-write strategies revealed the functions of their oral langauge during the writing events. Furthermore, these data illustrated the importance of oral languaging for the development of a young child's written language.

The children's discussions of thematic content of their written messages far exceeded all other categories of oral language use. They spontaneously dialogued with teachers and peers about the subject of their writing, sometimes stating specifically what they intended to write. Classmates and teachers usually responded to the writer with comments and questions that stimulated the discussion.

Nearly all of the children were willing and able oral readers of their own writing. Their graphic symbols represented personal meanings for them which they were eager to share with others. They also talked <u>about</u> their written products, telling what they had written and pointing out how their writing corresponded with parts of a drawing, a picture, or an object.

Some children named the letters they intended to write or were actually writing. This practice, however, seemed to distract the child's thinking from the message meaning.

For example, Aaron had drawn a picture, talked and wrote about it, and read each part of his writing. At one point, however, he named letters as he wrote, "Q S C." When asked to read it his response was, "I forgot what I was saying."

Some children expressed concern about their ability to write and need for help; these were the older four- and five-year olds. When asked to write, they evidently assumed that they were expected to use the adult model of writing which, of course, they were not able to do. Teachers encouraged them to rely on what they knew about writing, reassuring them that it would be accepted. The youngsters used cursive-like scribbles, random letters and invented spellings.

A few children talked about letter formation. Again, these were older four- and five-year-olds who probably had received information from parents or siblings about the "correct" way to write. For example, Melanie was writing her name and said, "My 'E' is messed up. Is these [this] supposed to be what it looks like?" Another child asked, "Do [Are] you supposed to make dots on 'i's ?" When the teacher answered, "Yes", the child reported, "He made a circle on his!"

Four children were observed using oral language simultaneous with writing. They used a reading-like voice

as they wrote. It appeared that they wanted the length of the writing to match the length of the oral languaging.

Discussion of placement was infrequent. When it was heard, it was in response to teacher comments or questions: "I'll write it here;" "I'll start down here;" or "I wrote in on the back." These statements were made in response to teacher comments and questions.

There was only one example of a child sounding to probe for sound-symbol relations. He struggled with the "F" and "B" sounds for the word "football". He looked to the teacher for assistance and received information from a classmate.

One child used rereading language for reorientation in the composing text. Each time Aaron added to his text, he reread what he had previously written and then verbalized his additional writing as he wrote.

There was also only one example of a discussion of title and authorship. This, however, was prompted by teacher comments and questions to which the children simply responded.

The use of oral language during writing events seemed to assist the children in investing their graphic symbols with meaning and in expressing that meaning during oral reading. Conversations prior to writing, discussions of

what was being written or what had been written, rereading language for reorientation in the composing unit, oral languaging simultaneous with writing, and oral reading after completion of writing appeared to be needed in order for the child to couple meaning with script. Children who spoke very little or not at all prior to or during drawing and writing were generally unable to read what they had written. In these cases, a teacher's request of, "What does that say?" or "Can you read that to me?" was usually met with silence or, "I don't know." On the other hand, children who talked spontaneously during the writing events were able to read what they had written. They not only fluently read their writing, but were also eager to show how their symbols corresponded with parts of a drawing or an actual object: "Teacher, look what this says ... it says cereal." (Points to writing and points to cereal box.)

The children's oral language also seemed to fulfill an organizational function, directing their activities as they worked. Sounding to probe for sound-symbol relations, letter naming, discussion of ability to write and need for help, self-directing statements, discussion of letter formation, discussion of placement, and discussion of title and authorship all appeared to be functions of oral language that assisted the youngsters in obtaining needed information

from others and themselves that would enable them to proceed with the writing process.

The results of this study lead to educational implications for prekindergarten teachers, directors of prekindergarten educational centers, and teacher educators. Greater numbers of three-, four-, and five-year olds are attending educational programs prior to entrance into public school kindergarten. Many of them are spending entire days with teachers who consider language arts activities an important component of the school program. If teachers are not familiar with the ways in which children use oral language to facilitate the writing process, they may impose upon their young students restrictions which make it difficult, if not impossible, for the children to make sense of their scripting. In many classrooms, talking is not allowed during writing periods. Children sit quietly at tables struggling with a writing activity presented by the teacher. It is not surprising that the written language produced is as limited as the oral languaging during the time allotted for writing.

Inservice teacher education programs that include a knowledge base of the developmental processes of learning to write and read can be presented. It is important that such training includes specific knowledge of children's

learning-to-write strategies and how teachers can enable these learning processes of children.

The findings from this study support the recent knowledge and understandings from the research literature related to the nature of early learning-to-write strategies of young children. More importantly, the findings reveal the importance of children using oral language to facilitate their written language productions.

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